research management
findings
Number 14 • June 1988

TROUT FISHING IN MILWAUKEE: THE URBAN ANGLING PROGRAM

By Ed Nelson and
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Most people in Wisconsin associate trout fishing with streams like the Bois Brule, the Pemebonwon, or the Namekagon. They don't think of the ponds and quarries of metropolitan Milwaukee. Yet since 1983 the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has stocked these ponds with trout in early spring. Bluegills and bullheads are also stocked (these species have been stocked since the 1960s).

The program's primary aim is to provide opportunities for children to fish. Fisheries managers hope that those who learn to fish as children will continue to fish as adults. The program also helps those whose chance to fish is limited by physical disability, age, or income. And it provides a general fishing opportunity for all anglers.

The program has expanded rapidly, and now extends from Kenosha in the south to Sheboygan in the north (Fig. 1). Managers currently stock 40 ponds and quarries in or near 16 municipalities. In 1987, they stocked 63,000 trout, 53,000 bluegills, and 40,000 bullheads, all "take home" size. Anglers spent over 20,000 hours fishing for them.

Despite the program's popularity, fisheries managers knew little about the anglers who fished the ponds. In particular, they were interested in determining angler satisfaction with the program and attitudes towards possible program changes. To provide this information, we surveyed 185 anglers who fished the ponds in 1987. We selected them from names gathered by the program's creel clerk. Each angler received a 17-page survey. Of the 185 people

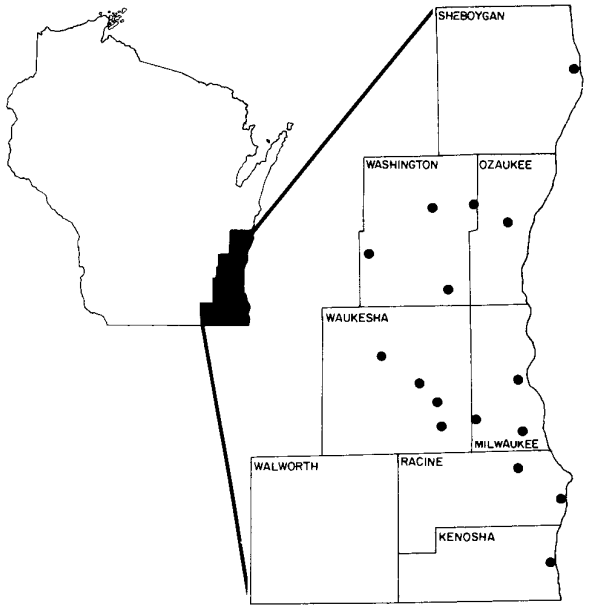

FIGURE 1. Municipalities with stocked ponds.

contacted, 84% completed the survey. Only adults were surveyed (children cannot be surveyed without parental consent).

Fishing Quality

Few might expect to find a high quality fishing experience in a major metropolitan area. Yet anglers' satisfaction with the fishing at the stocked ponds compares favorably with the satisfaction levels of those who fished more remote and rustic areas (Table 1). Twenty-four percent rated their fishing as "excellent" or "perfect", 47% as "good" or "very good", and 30% as "poor" or "very poor". Surveyed anglers explained their feelings about the program:

"I like the fact that right out of my back door I can go fishing and play tennis in the same park."

"It gives me a chance to take my sons fishing without having to travel a long distance."

"It affords me the opportunity to fish close to my place of residence. I am disabled and do not travel far distances."

"It is close to our home and gives us many evenings of relaxation and great meals."

Anglers expressed satisfaction with the size of the fish stocked (72%), the types of fish (84%), the number of fish (60%), and with the bag limit on trout (83%) (Table 2). Anglers expressed the strongest support for the main goal of the program: providing kids with a chance to fish. Ninety percent approved of this.

Although anglers liked the program they did identify problems (Table 3). Many felt that the stocked fish were caught too quickly. Fifty-four percent regarded this as a "medium" or "large" problem because some anglers kept more than a limit of 5 trout. Fifty-one percent saw this unethical behavior as a medium or large problem. "I do not like people taking double limits. People fish their limit, send one person home with the fish, and continue to fish the rest of the day, going back and forth," noted one angler. Interestingly, anglers did not report crowding as a significant problem. Only 31% saw it as a medium or large problem.

Program Changes

Anglers liked the program the way it is and opposed significant program changes. A majority of anglers opposed reducing the bag limit on trout from 5 to 3. More than half of those surveyed (53%) rejected this idea, 30% supported it, and 17% were undecided. Some opponents thought that those who violate the current bag limit would ignore a reduced bag limit. Others, however, thought that the proposal would distribute the fish more evenly among anglers. "I believe it would increase the catch ratio per person and everyone would have a better chance to catch fish," said one angler.

Nor did anglers support restricting adult fishing in favor of children. Under this proposal only children would be allowed to fish at the ponds prior to the traditional May opening day of the fishing season. Fifty-six percent of the respondents opposed this idea, 20% were undecided, and 24% supported it. Opponents felt that their license fees supported the program and that it would be unfair to exclude them. However, if a second stocking were made just before the regular opening, 63% said they would support the proposal.

Finally, anglers expressed only lukewarm support for a proposal to levy special fees to support

TABLE 1. Angler's response to the question: Overall, how would you rate your trip?

Anglers Surveyed	Excellent or Perfect	Good or Very Good	Poor or Fair
Brule River anglers	35%	44%	22%
Escanaba Lake anglers	14	34	52
S. Wisconsin trout anglers	33	50	17
Milwaukee urban anglers	24	47	30

TABLE 2. Anglers' satisfaction with selected aspects of the urban fishing program.

Aspect	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied
Type of fish stocked	84%	11%	5%
Size of fish stocked	72	19	9
Number of fish stocked	60	25	15
5 trout bag limit	83	14	3
Providing kids a chance to fish	90	6	4

TABLE 3: Anglers' perceptions of problems with the urban fishing program.

Problem	No Problem	Small Problem	Medium Problem	Large Problem
Fish caught out too quickly	16%	30%	23%	31%
Anglers taking more than their limit	22	27	20	31
Fish die-offs	31	33	19	17
Crowding	32	37	23	8

the program. Thirty-seven percent supported it, 38% opposed it, and 25% were undecided. Some felt that such fees would only further complicate their fishing. One angler said: "I think that there are too many fees, rules, stamps, and areas opened and closed. It is becoming scary to go out to have fun because you can't keep up with the changes and fear a warden will stop you. Too much bureaucracy!"

People commented that they thought the program could be improved by stocking fewer fish more often. And their comments suggest that they would like to see panfish stocked in the summer. Finally, anglers would like to see stepped-up law enforcement at the ponds.

Conclusions

Urban Milwaukee is not the northwoods. But anglers indicate they find satisfying fishing at the ponds and quarries stocked through the urban fishing program.

Anglers liked the program the way it is. They opposed reductions in the bag limit. Adults were reluctant to relinquish their right to fish in favor of those under the age of 16. They felt that such restriction would be unfair. Special fees to support the program enjoyed only lukewarm support. Anglers, however, would probably accept less sweeping changes in the program. Given their strong support for the program's goal of teaching children to fish, they would probably support special stockings of fish in ponds prior to fishing clinics. And they would probably accept the closure of selected ponds for limited times to give children a chance to practice their skills. The DNR is taking the survey results seriously and will use the results in developing future regulation changes.

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Edited by Betty Les

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